

Press Release

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PARTNERSHIP HELPS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCERS SELL CLEAN, WHOLESOME FOOD TO KENTUCKY FAMILIES

FRANKFORT, Ky. — The state and the University of Kentucky have teamed up to help Kentucky fruit and vegetable producers keep their products as clean and wholesome as possible from the field to the table.

The Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program is a partnership of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA), the state Department for Public Health (DPH), and the UK College of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service. It is designed to encourage farmers to voluntarily examine and improve their operations so they can offer fresh, healthy produce.

"Consumers increasingly are shopping for locally grown food out of a desire for freshness and concern for food safety," Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer said. "Kentucky family farms and food businesses have a real opportunity to increase their share of the food market. By utilizing this information, they can assure their customers that they are doing everything humanly possible to raise and sell products that their families can eat and enjoy with confidence."

"This is a wonderful proactive effort to help our Kentucky farmers and further assure the foods we grow in Kentucky will be safer than ever," said Dr. William D. Hacker, commissioner of DPH and acting undersecretary for health for the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

"We are excited to work with other agencies to assemble good recommendations and guidance to our Kentucky farmers," said Guy Delius, assistant director of the Division of Public Health Protection and Safety with DPH. "These food safety growing and harvesting recommendations will be a useful model for other states to follow. After all, what could be more important than helping to further assure a safe food supply for our citizens?"

The GAP partnership has mailed educational information to farmers and food processors throughout Kentucky with detailed instructions on best practices for growing, handling and transporting produce to minimize the risk of food contamination. The mailing provides thorough recommendations on water quality issues, animal manure handling, sanitation and other important aspects of fruit and vegetable production. The mailing consists of brochures from the University of California Vegetable Research and Information Center and Cornell University.

Producers are encouraged to download a farm self-audit workbook from the KDA Web site to assess their operations and make informed decisions on how to improve them. The workbook and supporting materials were developed by Cornell University.

“The partnership selected the latest and most producer-friendly information to provide to Kentucky producers,” said Mac Stone, director of the KDA’s Division of Value-Added Plant Production. “All materials are science-based, and the techniques have been proven over time.”

Extension agents will offer GAP training for farmers across the state, said Jimmy Henning, associate dean of Extension at the UK College of Agriculture. The Cooperative Extension Service will work closely with the state to train extension agents this fall to deliver the producer training. GAP training also will be offered at the Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference and Trade Show in January in Lexington. The partnership developed the curriculum for the classes with the help of more than 25 farmers’ market producers who critiqued the material and received the first GAP producer certificates for undergoing the training.

Bob Perry, coordinator of the Food Systems Initiative at the UK College of Agriculture, said the GAP program will help to assure that food from local farmers is as safe as possible. Perry said food safety is a concern of consumers as well as restaurants, which represent a rapidly growing market for locally grown produce.

“Kentucky has a reputation for producing fresh, wholesome produce picked at its prime,” Commissioner Farmer said. “The GAP program will increase customer confidence and encourage people to shop for Kentucky Proud produce.”

To download a copy of the self-audit workbook and supporting worksheets, go to www.kyagr.com, click on Programs, and click on (GAP) Good Agricultural Practices.